

ARTICLE

Presidential Succession Politics in Botswana: An Appraisal of Khama Masisi Transition

Batlang Seabo*  and Sonia Gaobolae§ 

Abstract

Peaceful presidential transitions have been the hallmark of Botswana's democracy since the country's independence in 1966. This was in stark contrast to other African countries where leaders overstayed in power and transitions were often conflictual. For most of the post-independence era, Botswana and Mauritius were exceptions to the trend, and Botswana was held in high regard as an exemplar of democracy in Africa. Political power transitions occurred seamlessly between presidents, albeit under one-party dominance. This paper revisits succession politics in Botswana and argues that the long-established practice of smooth presidential succession was interrupted by General Ian Khama's quest to preserve the Khama dynasty after his mandatory 10-year presidential term ended in April 2018. The paper shows that the preservation of a Khama dynasty was to be founded on Khama's reign, which was akin to hyper-presidentialism but aided by the country's Constitution. Khama deviated from the practices of other former presidents by choosing not only to openly and strongly criticize his successor but also to remain actively engaged in party politics in a bid to dislodge his chosen successor, Mokgweetsi Masisi.

Keywords: Botswana; parliamentary system; presidential succession, hyper-presidentialism, dynastic politics, Ian Khama presidency

Introduction

Following independence from colonial rule, several African countries fell under various non-democratic political regimes to varying degrees. However, Botswana and Mauritius adopted different political trajectories by retaining multi-party democracy. While democratic experiments failed in other African countries, Botswana emerged as a true exemplar of democracy in Africa. Scholars attribute Botswana's political exceptionalism to free and relatively fair regular multiparty elections (Molutsi 2005; Molomo 2012; Tsie 2017). The practice of seamless transfer of presidential power also made Botswana stand out, even though only one party has dominated elections since 1966 (Selolwane 2002; Molutsi 2005; Maundeni 2005; Keorapetse 2013). This paper revisits Botswana's political system and analyses presidential succession, focusing on the transition from Ian Khama to Mokgweetsi Masisi in 2018.

The paper shows that while Ian Khama upheld Botswana's longstanding democratic practice of peaceful transfer of power to his successor, Mokgweetsi Masisi, the political feud and developments that subsequently ensued may suggest that Khama wanted to maintain a Khama dynasty. Contrary to his predecessors, Khama broke away from a longstanding tradition by not only defecting from the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) but also forming an opposition party to help dislodge the BDP from power.

This paper contributes to the literature in two important ways. First, it analyses Ian Khama's presidency as an era of hyper-presidentialism and personalisation of power. While it may be argued that Khama acted within the confines of the constitution in exercising executive

* Batlang Seabo, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Botswana. Email: seabob@ub.ac.bw

§ Sonia Gaobolae, independent researcher, Gaborone. Email: sgaobolae@gmail.com

powers, the evidence presented in this paper leads us to conclude that Ian Khama nevertheless personalised political power. The paper also contributes to the few existing works by Makgala et al. (2020), Ookeditse (2021), Seabo and Nyehuis (2021), Makgala and Malila (2022), and Lotshwao and Tumediso (2024) that analyze the political dynamics of post-presidency Khama and the implications for Botswana's political system. The paper adopts a qualitative research design and is primarily a desktop-based study. It relies on secondary sources of data including published reports, books, journal articles, and media material. It is structured into five sections and begins with a brief overview of Botswana's parliamentary system. The next section discusses presidential transitions from the founding President Sir Seretse Khama to Botswana's fourth President Festus Mogae. The third section focuses on the latter part of Ian Khama's presidency as a precursor to this paper's focal point: the transition to Mokgweetsi Masisi and his ensuing feud with Khama. The article argues that Khama's political maneuvers post-presidency are indicative of his quest to entrench a Khama dynasty.

Botswana's Parliamentary System-anointing Presidents?

It is widely accepted by scholars that Botswana operates a parliamentary political system that features a president who is both head of the executive and head of state (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2006; Molomo 2012). This is a departure from the ideal type of the Westminster parliamentary system, which features a prime minister as head of government and the monarch as a ceremonial head of state (Kiiver 2009). This departure has led scholars to label Botswana's political system as a hybrid, combining aspects of presidential and parliamentary systems (Osei-Hwedie and Sebudubudu 2006; Molomo 2012). Typical of parliamentary systems, the head of state in Botswana is not directly elected by the populace; rather, the leader of the party with the parliamentary electoral majority becomes the president (Molomo 2000).

The indirect election of the president has endured since independence, despite calls from observers, scholars, and citizens for the direct election of the president. Molomo (2000) strongly criticises how a president is elected in Botswana and makes a compelling case for the direct election of the president. He argues that a president who enjoys extensive executive powers must enjoy the popular support of the people. Similarly, a 2012 Afrobarometer study reported that more than half (59%) of Botswana supported direct election of the president. Notably, this was a significant leap from 2008 when about the same proportion preferred the current system of parliament selecting the president. The 2022 Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Review of the Constitution of Botswana report indicated that among proposals for a constitutional review, Botswana wanted direct election of the president. However, contrary to those admitted views from Botswana, the recommendation of the commission was to retain the current system (Republic of Botswana 2022). These findings imply that Botswana's political system would have to be reformed into a presidential system. Presidentialism has been defined as a form of government in which the president as the chief executive is elected by popular vote, either directly or indirectly, and both presidential and legislative terms are fixed (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997).

The constitution of Botswana is also found to be complicit in anointing presidents just as much as the political system. To put this into context, Molomo (2000:105) asserts that 'both the BDP and country constitutions provide that if, for one reason or another, the President vacates office the Vice-President automatically becomes President'. According to Poteete (2012:86), 'Two constitutional amendments in 1998 sought to contain [BDP] factional competition over the presidency and thus facilitate generational change. The first introduced a ten-year presidential term limit and was welcomed as a check on presidential authority. The second provided for the automatic succession of the vice-president to the presidency if the office became vacant through death or resignation.'

The practice of automatic succession was justified because it would ensure a smooth transition and avoid a power vacuum before the next elections. Masire pushed through a constitutional amendment for automatic succession by the vice president if the president became unable to continue (Masire 2006). As the latter sections of this paper demonstrate, the parliamentary system and automatic succession are two-edged swords. While they have ensured relative stability, predictability, and certainty in the transfer of power and presidential succession, they contain seeds of destruction with far-reaching political implications. Section 47 of the Constitution of Botswana also yields hyper-presidentialism that is characterised by excessive presidential powers and limited checks. In addition to constitutional powers, scholars find that the approval rating of the president and the economic and social context are also crucial indicators of the intensity of presidentialism (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997). These indicators are revisited under the Khama presidency, but first, a brief review of the administrations of and transitions between his predecessors merits attention.

From Seretse Khama to Festus Mogae: Era of Peaceful Transitions

While critiques of Botswana's democracy point to a lack of consolidation defined in the Huntingtonian power rotation thesis (Good 2010; Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2006), before 2018 peaceful presidential transitions were the hallmark of Botswana's democratic standing. At the risk of reiterating debates and the record of the presidencies of Khama, Masire, and Mogae, we briefly revisit them to make a point about smooth transitions and a culture of respect and statesmanship post their presidency. The founding president, Seretse Khama's strong convictions on democracy, astute leadership, and tolerance for opposition probably laid the foundation not only for democracy but also for power exchange between presidents. This is the case notwithstanding his uninterrupted fourteen years in power, which inevitably owed to both his popularity and international acclaim. According to Parsons et al. (1995) when he went into politics, Seretse, was already very well-known internationally and would go on to become Botswana's founding president.

Among some notable feats of Seretse's administration was his apprehension against his supporters' request for him to declare Botswana a one-party state (see Botlhomilwe and Sebudubudu 2011), following what was then the African trend. For Seretse, Botswana was a poor state hence opposition criticism was useful as it would guard against abuse of power (Dubbeld 1992). According to Rotberg (2013:201), 'Khama was an exponent and promoter of a national democratic political culture that ultimately allowed strong institutions to rise on the foundation he laid'. Although not untrue, Rotberg's characterisation becomes questionable when mirrored against Seretse's preference for the absolute power that the Constitution of Botswana grants a sitting president, the creation of which he was a part of (Masire 2006). Presiding over the country across three elections at a time when his popularity and that of the BDP held sway, his anointing by the political system was more of putting a *cherry on the cake*.

When his vice president, Quett Masire, ascended to the presidency following Seretse's untimely passing in 1980, the international spotlight began to shine on Botswana for several reasons. Politically, the stability of the country in a troubled region catapulted her to a higher status, while economically, evidence suggests that the country was among the fastest-growing economies in the world (Good and Taylor 2006; Magang 2015). According to Garvin (2018), Seretse's successor, Masire, oversaw a period of tremendous development and steered Botswana into its place alongside Norway as a counterexample to the 'resource curse'. However, Masire too continued to benefit from a political system that ensured that he ruled the country for 19 years until he was shoved out of power (Ntuane 2018). Notably, even though the transition was peaceful, Masire bowed out of state power in the wake of corruption scandals and mismanagement that bedevilled the ruling party, implicating top elites in the echelons of power, which other scholars decry as hardly a model transition (Good and Taylor 2006).

Masire's vice president, Festus Mogae a technocrat who succeeded Masire as the first beneficiary of automatic succession in 1998, ascended to power at the height of factionalism as two main factions jostled for control of the party (Molomo 2000; Good and Taylor 2006; Ntuane 2018). In terms of the exercise of executive powers, the first three presidents occasionally used constitutional powers for political convenience. The introduction of the indirect election of the president was supposedly the brainchild of Seretse Khama, which, according to Parsons *et al.* (1995:299) was 'the first step on the way to autocracy'. Moreover, executive powers were more overtly used in the dispensation of specially elected members of parliament to appoint BDP candidates some of whom had lost elections. Nevertheless, the three presidents took Botswana from the bottom of nearly every development index at independence in 1966 to the upper middle-income status it enjoys today, peacefully and with integrity (Good and Taylor 2006; Gavin 2018).

This paper also argues that there was a culture of mutual respect between Mogae and the late Masire. Nevertheless, this culture and peaceful presidential transitions were eventually surmounted by the very institutional mechanisms that created them post-Ian Khama presidency. To set the context, the section that follows revisits key events of Ian Khama's presidency and shows that his presidency inaugurated an era of hyper-presidentialism in Botswana due to some instances of excessive use of executive powers.

The Presidency of Ian Khama: Personalised power and hyper-presidentialism

By all accounts, the presidency of Ian Khama would go down in history as an era of hyper-presidentialism and personalisation of power perhaps found in some Latin American presidential systems. In the sections below, we argue that Khama's presidency typified hyper-presidentialism and personalisation of power because, in the former, Khama used both his constitutional powers, popularity, and state media to achieve his political agenda. In the latter case, several policies and decisions by Khama bordered on personalisation of power as key institutions were blatantly circumvented and some were clearly geared towards Khama's aggrandisement.

Mainwaring and Shugart (1997) observe that the elements of hyper-presidentialism include strong executive powers, high approval ratings, and some contextual factors such as the performance of the economy. In addition, the ability of such presidents to use media to influence and mobilize public opinion is critical in advancing their political agenda. It is also noted that these factors influence the control the president has over actors and institutions and when both political and contextual powers are high, the president can implement his agenda without major vetoes (Petersen and Somuano 2021). The Afrobarometer survey shows that when he ascended to the presidency, Khama's approval rating was considerably high and government performance in managing the economy was positively rated. In the first Afrobarometer survey (2008) after his ascendance to power, Khama's approval rating was at an overwhelming 88% even though by 2012, his approval rating plummeted to 76%, it was still considerably high (Afrobarometer 2012).

In 1998, General Ian Khama resigned from the military to join active politics. President Mogae immediately appointed him vice president, acting on the recommendations of the Schlemmer report to save the BDP from factionalism, which threatened its stability at the time (Molomo 2000; Nasha 2014). Notably, his entrance into politics ushered in mixed reactions in society; on the one hand, his being Seretse's son and resultant chiefly status endeared him to ordinary citizens while on the other hand, his military background ushered in an aura of fear in some quarters. There was a widespread sentiment within the country, not without foundation, that Ian Khama possessed decidedly authoritarian tendencies and valued allegiance over merit (Good and Taylor 2006).

His entrance into politics inaugurated an era of personalisation, as evidenced by some entitlements and expectations created to appease Khama. A classic instance was when Festus Mogae granted Khama sabbatical leave and permitted him to fly Botswana Defence Force aircraft against the law and advice of the Ombudsman. In this vein, Good (2016:5) describes the way Khama entered politics as ‘retrograde and undemocratic, a throwback to pre-independence hereditary politics’. In 2008, Khama automatically succeeded Mogae following the latter’s completion of his constitutional two-term limit. Observers note fundamental differences between the presidency of Khama and his predecessors. First, Khama surrounded himself with trusted loyalists most of whom were drawn from the army and strategically placed in key bureaucratic institutions something political scientist Kenneth Good (2009) describes as the militarisation of Botswana's civil service. Good sufficiently catalogues some of the military appointments into the bureaucracy thus:

General Merafhe became Vice-President, the former Captain Kitso Mokaila became Minister for Environment, Wildlife, and Tourism, and, as noted, Brigadier Ramadeluka took over at Justice, Defence, and Security...The appointment of military men reportedly cascaded downwards, with retired Lieutenant-Colonel Moakohi Modisenyane as general manager of the Central Transport Organization and Colonel Silas Motlalekosi as head of the Prison Service (Good 2009:322).

These appointments bore all the hallmarks of unwavering loyalty to the leader, much to the detriment of merit. While it is reasonable to conclude that Khama acted within the remit of his constitutional powers, just like his predecessors, a disturbing trend emerged where Khama’s autocratic tendencies found support within the political party he led, and to a degree the majority of Batswana, particularly in the rural areas. This is demonstrated by former cabinet minister and former speaker of parliament, Margaret Nasha (2014) blaming members of the BDP for creating an authoritarian leader in Khama, recalling that during a BDP congress, they ululated and cheered at the pronouncement of a constitutional reform recommendation that empowered Khama to expel a member accused of wrongdoing without due process prescribed in the constitution. Moreover, Good (2016:5) argues that ‘General Khama’s more overt autocracy was founded upon established presidential power’. Section 47 of the Constitution of Botswana empowers the president to exercise executive powers including the power to make key appointments and is not obliged to consult.

The rise of Khama to the presidency heralded an era of fear in society and an overt affront to individual freedoms (Freedom House 2017). The genesis of this state of fear has everything to do with the introduction of the Intelligence and Security Services Bill in Parliament in 2007, which stimulated adverse reactions from society (Molomo 2012). According to Good (2016), the Directorate on Intelligence and Security (DIS) is the institution that typified Khama’s dominance and the DIS gained public prominence when a wanted criminal suspect John Kalafatis was shot dead in Gaborone in 2009. The killing of Kalafatis in a public execution style was one of several other reported killings at the hands of the DIS without following due process through the courts of law. This is illustrated by the fact that ‘there had been 12 shootings in which 8 people died between April 1, 2008, and March 2009, and according to the Law Society of Botswana, “immense fear” existed in the nation’ (Good 2016:6). The fear that engulfed the once peaceful society permeated even state institutions, government officials, including the then minister of trade under Khama’s regime, confessing that the whole executive lived in fear of the DIS. Responding to a parliamentary Public Accounts Committee inquiry on the National Petroleum Fund mismanagement saga, the minister complained that:

The money was moved to DIS. Expenditure was spent but people have now been charged with money laundering. Unfortunately, we all know now where the money is. But there is this fear; there is this fear we have of the DIS, which we all fear. The Directorate on Crime and Economic Crime (DCEC) also fears DIS. Equally, I do. And so does any other Minister that I know (Kaelo 10 April 2018).

Khama and the DIS were feared to the extent that Margaret Nasha painted a picture where members of the BDP were fearful to even complain openly about Khama's leadership style in the BDP and would rather do so behind closed doors (Nasha 2014). The Media Institute for Southern Africa (2009) noted that during Khama's reign, a cloud of fear had descended on civilian life in Botswana, impacting freedom of expression and the constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of expression. The media ostensibly suffered the brunt of Khama's rule. To ensure that only government programs were favourably aired in public media, the Department of Broadcasting Services was strategically placed under the Office of the President to closely monitor its programming. To this end, the opposition decried the abuse of state media by Khama and the ruling BDP. A study conducted by the Ombudsman found that the ruling BDP enjoyed disproportionate coverage by state television, Botswana Television. The report shows that the BDP enjoyed 82% of coverage as compared to 18% shared by the rest of the opposition parties and out of 89 activities, only 16 from the opposition were found to be newsworthy by BTV compared to 73 from the BDP (Mokwena 8 June 2017).

Private media endured a sour relationship with Khama as he deemed private journalists unpatriotic. The highlight of his disdain for private media was his decision to shun press conferences, not even addressing a single press conference during his tenure as president. The affront on media and journalists' freedoms, as well as their existence, worsened when the BDP government imposed an advertising ban on private media, stifling newspapers' advertising revenue (MISA 18 December 2014). Typical of autocratic rule where freedom of information is curtailed, private media was punished for allegedly reporting negatively on the BDP government, particularly exposing corruption scandals. To this end, Freedom House noted that:

While Botswana has a robust media sector, authorities in 2016 sought to suppress reporting on the opposition and issues related to corruption. In February, the government confirmed that state media outlets had been ordered not to report on some opposition activities, which officials described as failing to meet editorial policies; in one instance, reporters had covered an opposition rally but did not broadcast it after being told by superiors that it was not newsworthy (Freedom House 2017).

Previously alien to Botswana, arrests and detainment of journalists had become a regular occurrence and some, fearing for their lives fled the country. For instance, in one of the incidents, a private journalist fled to South Africa fearing for his life after security agents reportedly harassed him for writing a series of stories about the executive arm of the government (MISA 26 October 2014). In March 2016, freelance journalist Sonny Serite was arrested and held overnight at a police station in Gaborone, where he was denied access to a lawyer. Serite had recently published a series of stories about corrupt contracts involving the national railway (Freedom House 2017).

In his inauguration speech on 1 April 2008, Khama pledged that his administration would be guided by among other pillars, democracy (Khama 2008). His leadership, however, typified autocracy, where a leader dominates state institutions. Good (2009:320) postulates that 'two characteristics of Khama's highly personalised rule during the period 1998-2009 stand out, his reliance on edicts or directives, and decision by caprice'. For instance, whereas consultation in policymaking lies at the centre of a democracy, Khama unilaterally pronounced

policy positions. In this respect, Good (2009:323) avers that ‘President Khama’s apparent reliance on close loyalists influenced his leadership style, elevating his military and dynastic personality, and excluding others, especially established institutions and processes, from the running of the country’. For illustration, in 2008 Khama imposed a 30% alcohol levy without prior consultation with all stakeholders involved, which hurt the alcohol industry as a whole including small traders who make a living from the alcohol trade. In so doing, Khama alienated captains of industry and civil society, which is an anathema to due consultation in the policy-making process. As if that was not enough, Khama unilaterally pronounced a salary adjustment of 3% in 2010 at a *kgotla* meeting while a consultative process at the Public Service Bargaining Council was underway. Khama strategically chose his audience and abhorred engaging with the trade unions, let alone allowing a legally constituted bargaining process to unfold. A personal ruler circumvents institutions and legitimises his decisions by appealing to and endearing himself to a specific group of people, which is what Khama mastered. Notably, state media was extensively used to follow and cover the president (Balule 2017).

Moreover, the independence of the judiciary came under attack as Khama unilaterally made judicial appointments disregarding the input of the Judicial Services Commission (JSC). The JSC, which is charged with, among other functions, recommending judicial appointments did not have it easy with Khama. Good (2016) posits that there were serious limitations in the independence and strength of the judiciary, and secrecy prevailed in the appointment of judges by the president on the recommendation of the JSC. For instance, among cases of secretive appointments was a highly publicised case in which the JSC had recommended the appointment of Omphemetse Motumise as a high court judge. President Khama ignored the recommendation of the JSC and did not disclose his reasons for not appointing him. The Law Society of Botswana (LSB) instituted legal proceedings and in granting Motumise’s appeal, Lord Arthur Hamilton states, ‘I am of the view that the President acted unconstitutionally in declining to appoint the second appellant to the office of a Judge of the High Court and that, in that respect, the appeal must succeed’ (Hamilton 2017:20-21)). Even though Khama eventually relented and appointed Motumise as judge, his initial refusal to do so without divulging the reasons justified that indeed he had personalised official government appointments. Perhaps the abrupt closure of Bamangwato Consolidated Limited (BCL) copper-nickel mine in Selibe Phikwe in 2016 represented the most blatant disregard for consultation by Khama. This action threw about 6000 mine workers onto the streets and threatened to render the mining town of Selebi Phikwe a ghost town (Selathwa 2022).

As noted, corruption is not a recent phenomenon in Botswana, but under the Khama regime, it rose to levels where Botswana even put it at 81% (Molomo *et al.* 2014). It is perhaps during Khama’s reign that the status of Botswana declined according to reputable international indices such as Transparency International, Freedom House, and The Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Konopo 2017; Freedom House 2017; Mo Ibrahim 2017). What was unique about Khama’s presidency was that the president used state institutions and resources to finance his private life. The construction of an airstrip on his private property and subsequent constructions carried out by the military using military resources is illustrative. According to a *Sunday Standard* report, the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) constructed an airfield in Mosu on a private piece of land owned by Khama. Once completed, the airfield would form part of the president’s elaborate array of holiday resort infrastructure (*Sunday Standard* 22 September 2013). Characteristic of African personal rulers who amassed wealth through public resources, on the eve of his departure from power, Khama prevailed over BDP MPs to pass a bill to amend the pensions and retirement benefits entitled to retiring presidents, which was viewed by critics as an attempt to sustain the president’s lifestyle. The list of Khama’s retirement benefits was massive in comparison to the benefits to which former presidents were entitled:

In addition to other benefits, new clauses permitted the president to work in government while he continued to earn 80% of his monthly salary and even to choose his preferred location for a retirement home. Moreover, the president, a pilot by training, could fly government aircraft, use boats, or any other preferred mode of transport (Presidents Pension and Retirement Benefits Act 2017).

Even though some of the benefits including flying government aircraft have since been reversed under the new administration, Khama exhibited the character of a personal ruler and was willing to go miles to achieve whatever he wanted. This reversal and curtailment of Khama's demands for a luxurious package of benefits caused consternation between Khama and his successor, President Masisi, who unexpectedly moved swiftly to isolate Khama. As we argue in the section that follows, the reversal of Khama's demands and some of his policies, combined with Khama's onslaught on his successor's administration, probably accentuates the personalisation of power and the preservation of the Khama dynasty. Moreover, consistent with the academic contribution of this paper, that Khama's administration set a precedent for the more personalized exercise of power is proved by the current administration of President Masisi; in 2024, the Minister of State President tabled a bill to also amend the retired Presidents retirement benefits Act. With this amendment, the President's retirement benefits would now extend to his children (regardless of circumstances of birth), he or she would be entitled to a personalized car, to determine the number of their security details and also for their spouse and children to continue benefiting from the state in the event of the death of the president, among others (Makhaiza 30 July 2024). While the bill was withdrawn on account of public outrage (see Morwaeng 4 August 2024), the creation of the bill validates the argument of the paper.

End of the Khama Dynasty and Perils of Automatic Succession

Scholars observe that the Khama dynasty is probably one of Africa's longest dynasties (Southall and Melber 2006). Indeed, until 2018, when Ian Khama stepped down from the presidency, the Khama name had dominated Botswana politics since pre-independence times (Parsons *et al.* 1995). Notably, the Khama dynasty rose to much prominence in the post-independence era following the ascension of Seretse Khama to the presidency. To his credit, on 1 April 2018, Khama put the fears of many to rest when he handed over the Botswana presidency to his vice president, Mokgweetsi Masisi, as constitutionally provided for (Brown 2020). The fears of many, based on the above-discussed events throughout Khama's tenure, had been that he might want to cling to power as many African presidents had done (Dixon 1 April 2018), especially military leaders. Reuters (31 March 2018) reported that Mokgweetsi Masisi became the third leader to take charge of the Southern African nation outside the Khama political dynasty that has dominated national politics since independence from Britain in 1966.

However, not too long after this 'smooth transition for which this Southern African country is known' (Jacobson 31 March 2008), some reports suggested there had been a fallout between Khama and President Masisi. However, when President Masisi delivered his maiden State of the Nation Address in November 2018, he admitted that 'the transition from the previous administration has not been as smooth as expected' and that he had engaged some senior citizens to 'assist and lead in smoothing the transition', but regrettably 'their efforts had not borne fruit up to that point' (Masisi 2018:81). At the heart of the discord were unfulfilled promises by Masisi to appoint Khama's younger brother and cabinet minister Tshekedi Khama as vice president. Though publicly denied by Khama in numerous instances when questioned about it by the media, Makgala and Malila (2022:307) write that former president Mogae confirmed that Khama had appointed Masisi as his vice president on the condition that when Masisi became president, he would pick Khama's younger brother, Tshekedi Khama, as his vice president. Moreover, according to some observations, it was *not* a secret that Khama had

planned to have Masisi, whom he elevated to the vice presidency, return the favour by making Tshekedi his vice president (*Sunday Standard* 28 April 2023). Similarly, Ookeditse (2020) blames what he calls ‘the burden of expectations’ occasioned by the automatic succession and makes a case for the direct election of the president considering the political instability resulting from the Khama-Masisi feud. Considering this evidence and the fact that for the first time, the Khamas were not part of national leadership as reported by a *Sunday Standard* reporter (28 April 2023), it does not seem far-fetched to conclude that the root cause of the fallout may have had much to do with Khama’s attempt to preserve the Khama dynasty using his successor. Morton (2019) writes that ‘Former presidents Masire and Mogae, as well as other veterans who detested Khama’s “New BDP”, gave Masisi guidance in private late-night meetings’.

After this breakdown of relations between the former president and his successor became public knowledge, the two engaged in numerous public shows of disapproval for one another. At the heart of Khama’s disapproval, it seems were the seeming actions of President Masisi to ‘cleanse the presidency of his predecessor’s autocratic legacy’ (INK Center for Investigative Journalism 2018). Key among these actions was the unceremonious sacking of the founding director general of the country’s Directorate of Intelligence and Security Services (DISS), Isaac Kgosi, a close friend and ally of Khama. As highlighted above, the DISS itself is the brainchild of Khama and has long been a sore point of contention for Botswana (*Sunday Standard* 23 March 2017). Kgosi was one among a long list of suspected beneficiaries of the looting and corruption synonymous with the Khama administration. In January 2019, he was arrested in a highly publicized operation by the same DIS he had headed (Mlambo 18 January 2019).

Outside of fighting the corruption web woven in the past years, Masisi also made some key policy changes, all apparently aimed at bettering the lives of ordinary Botswana. Among those was the lifting of a 2014 elephant ban, citing the overpopulation of elephants, which is blamed for causing major human-wildlife conflict, much to the detriment of the people (Mbaiwa and Mogende 2022; Lotshwao and Tumedisio, 2024)). For some time, the policy change dominated international media headlines and became a source of unpleasant public relations for President Masisi and the country, further fuelled by Khama and his engagements with the said international media. For the lifting of the hunting ban specifically, Khama pushed the narrative that the reasons given by the government were a cover-up and that the true motivation for the lifting of the ban was to entice rural voters in the run-up to the 2019 elections (Bale 22 May 2019) and also to spite him, considering that at the time the feud between him and President Masisi was seeing the government seemingly erasing his legacy in so far as his preferred civil servants, government initiatives and passion projects (Mckenzie 2 June 2019). In general, the international conservation society was critical of Botswana’s decision, citing the known ethical issues around trophy hunting (Animal Wildlife Foundation 2019) According to Lotshwao and Tumedisio (2024:457) Khama’s campaign made a mockery of Botswana’s conservation efforts and more importantly, it undermined Botswana’s national interests as the country seeks to use the tourism sector to diversify the economy away from diamonds. But what emerged from these dynamics was the perilous implications of automatic succession on the politics of Botswana. To illustrate, the 2019 Afrobarometer iteration indicates that Botswana was concerned about the political and economic implications of the fallout between Khama and Masisi (Table 1).

Table 1: The Khama-Masisi Fallout Implications Botswana 2019¹⁴

Variable	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
The fallout between the previous & current president will lead to political instability.	83	11
The fallout between the previous & current president will lead to economic instability.		

Source: Afrobarometer (2019)

The Return of Ian Khama and Implications for the 2024 Election

The escalation of the feud between Masisi and Khama led to the latter fleeing the country for South Africa in late 2021. Khama reasoned that his life was in danger from the state intelligence agency, the DIS (Du Plessis 28 November 2021). Du Plessis (28 November 2021) writes that Khama dismissed reports that he was attempting to flee arrest in Botswana, but he said that Masisi had been using state institutions to go after him. Khama initially claimed that he was in South Africa for a visit and would return shortly. When addressing some dignitaries at Fort Hare University, Khama stated ‘Of course it helps that I have been here in South Africa in recent times. Some of you may have heard why I am here. I am here as a long-term tourist. And I am here with other tourists, my brother [Tshekedi Khama] – a member of parliament in Botswana’ (Whande 22 February 2023).

However, three years would elapse despite several undertakings from Khama that he would return. Khama and his brothers even missed attending the funeral of their sister Jacqueline Khama in June 2022 (Selelo 3 June 2022) as well as that of Isaac Kgosi. Until this time, Khama had, in different fora, reiterated his fear of returning to Botswana, claiming that his life was in danger. However, in a surprise turn of events, Khama showed up in court in Gaborone just a month before the much-anticipated October 2024 general elections, went back to South Africa, and returned to Botswana shortly after to campaign for BPF. Booty (13 September 2024) writes that Ian Khama unexpectedly returned to the country after three years of self-imposed exile, appearing in court to face charges, including money laundering and owning illegal firearms. With Khama back in the country and having made indications that he would ascend to his paramount chief throne in Serowe, several questions arose, especially regarding his earlier fears of threats on his life by the state (Booty 13 September 2024). Khama’s return questions his motives and to this extent, it may validate our argument of his quest to preserve the Khama dynasty. The bigger questions surrounding Khama’s return were around the extent to which he would retain and gain public favour, considering that various developments had taken place since 2019 in so far as the governance of the Masisi administration. The fabrication of charges against Khama, specifically the ‘stolen P100 billion’ as has come to be known, is one of the significant indictments against the Masisi administration (Pheage 21 November 2019; Mathala 01 August 2021). The persecution and prosecution of allies of Khama as well, which also fell flat on merit (Kanono 23 August 2021; Mokwape 07 June 2024), compounded the situation of the administration being considered vindictive and untruthful among others. Similarly, corruption and related allegations that have since been put forth against President Masisi, especially by opposition members, have painted a picture of an administration that is looting with impunity (Mosinyi 29 November 2021). A perfect example is the court battle between members of the President’s extended family, over the procurement and sharing of a government tender worth millions of Pula, with damning allegations of corruption against the ruling party and its senior members (Piet 22 August 2023; Mathala 08 March 2024). Furthermore, the Masisi administration inherited an unemployment problem that has only gotten

¹⁴ Response categories agree and strongly agree collapsed & disagree & strongly disagree collapsed.

worse in the five years since 2019; as of the first quarter of 2024, unemployment in Botswana stood at 27.6% (Statistics Botswana 2024).

As the general elections beckoned, the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF), a party Khama formed and became its patron confirmed that once Khama had settled, the party would rope him in to assist in their campaigns. As Rantsimako (26 September 2024) writes, Khama would be fully involved in the 2024 election campaign of the BPF after which he would assume his role as *Kgosikgolo* (paramount Chief) of Bamangwato.

Heading into the 2024 elections, the political landscape was alive with endless possibilities, especially with former President Khama at the center. Having made history by quitting the ruling BDP, mentoring a new political outfit, the BPF, and pledging support for opposition parties, Khama was at the core of the confusion in the BDP and the opposition parties.

Conclusion

Democratic practice and peaceful presidential transitions have been defining features of Botswana's electoral democracy since independence. For most of the post-independence era, Botswana resembled a unique case of democratic practice and good leadership, especially under the first three administrations. However, the ascendance of Ian Khama to state power in 2008 heralded an aura of fear, abuse of freedoms, autocratic rule at the expense of institutional governance, and increased corruption.

While Khama used constitutional powers like his predecessors, this paper demonstrates that his was akin to hyper-presidentialism, and the murky transition to Masisi belied a quest to preserve the longstanding Khama dynasty. This raises implications for the political system and indeed automatic succession, and once again amplifies calls for the direct election of the president. The failure of the Masisi administration to reform the constitution to among others introduce the direct election of the president is equally an indictment to the political system and perhaps a testament that he believes in automatic succession for personal interests too.

References

Official documents, reports and survey data

Hamilton, J 19 April 2017. *Court of Appeal Civil Appeal NO. CACGB-031-16*,

https://legalbrief.co.za/media/filestore/2017/06/Law_Society_of_Botswana_v_President_AppealCourt
3

Republic of Botswana 2022. *Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Review of the Constitution of Botswana. 2022.. Gaborone: Government of Botswana.*

Republic of Botswana, 1966. *Constitution of Botswana. Gaborone: Government Printing*

Statistics Botswana, July 2024. 'Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey: Labour Force Module Quarter 1',

<https://www.statsbots.org.bw/sites/default/files/Quarterly%20Multi%20Topic%20Survey%20Labour%20Force%20Module%20Quarter%201%202024.pdf>

Afrobarometer, 2008. *The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Botswana*, www.afrobarometer.org

Afrobarometer, 2012. *The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Botswana*, www.afrobarometer.org

Afrobarometer, 2019. *The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Botswana*, www.afrobarometer.org

Secondary Sources

- Balule, TB and Dambe, B 2018. 'The Right of Access to State-held Information in Botswana: Lessons from Emerging International Human Rights Jurisprudence', *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, vol. 44 (3), pp429-451.
- Brown, C 2020. 'Botswana Votes 2019: Two-party Competition and the Khama Factor', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(4), pp.703-722.
- Dubbeld, G 1992. *They Fought for Freedom: Seretse Khama*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Gavin, M.D 2018. 'Bucking Authoritarian Trend, Botswana Welcomes Its Fifth New President', *Africa in Transition*, www.cfr.org
- Good, K 2002. 'Rethinking Non-accountability and Corruption in Botswana', *Africa Insight*, 32(3), pp11-18.
- Good, K. and Taylor, I 2006. 'Unpacking the "Model": Presidential Succession in Botswana', *Legacies of Power: Leadership Change and Former Presidents in African Politics*. pp.51-72.
- Good, K 2008. *Diamonds, Dispossession and Democracy in Botswana*. Boydell and Brewer.
- Good, K 2009. 'The Presidency of General Ian Khama: The Militarisation of the Botswana "Miracle"', *African Affairs*, vol. 109(435), pp.315-324.
- Good, K 2016. 'Democracy and Development in Botswana', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35(1), pp113-128.
- Good, K, and Taylor, I 2008. 'Botswana: A Minimalist Democracy', *Democratization* 15(4), pp.750-765.
- Keorapetse, DL 2013. 'Monopoly Politikos: An Account of a De Facto One-Party State and Lack of Regime Change in Botswana', *Regime Change and Succession Politics in Africa*. Routledge. pp.217-237.
- Khama, I 2009. 'Inauguration Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Botswana Lt General Seretse Khama Ian Khama', 20 October 2009, www.gov.bw
- Khama, S 1970. *Botswana: A Developing Democracy in Southern Africa*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Kiiver, P 2009. 'Legal Accountability to a Political Forum? The European Commission, the Dutch Parliament and the Early Warning System for the Principle of Subsidiarity', *Maastricht Faculty of Law Working Paper* 5(8).
- Lotshwao, K and Suping, K. 2013. 'The 2010 Split of the Botswana Democratic Party', *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, vol. 27(2), pp343-360.
- Lotshwao, K and Tumediso, B. 2024. 'The Conflict between President Mokgweetsi Masisi and his Predecessor, Ian Khama, in Botswana', *The Round Table*, vol. 113 (5), pp.451-461.
- Magang, D 2015. *Delusions of Grandeur: Paradoxies and Ambivalences in Botswana's Macroeconomic Firmament*. Gaborone: Print Media Consult.
- Mainwaring, S 1997. *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Makgala, CJ, Chebanne, A, Manatsha, BT and Sesa, LL 2020. 'The Discourse of Tribalism in Botswana's 2019 General Elections', *Alternation*, vol. 27, pp210-249.
- Masire, QKJ 2006. *Very Brave or Very Foolish? The Memoirs of an African Democrat*. Gaborone: Macmillan.
- Mbaiwa, JE and Mogende, E 2022. 'Lifting of the Hunting Ban and the Elephant Debate in Botswana: Implications for Conservation and Development in Southern Africa',

- Protected Areas and Tourism in Southern Africa*. Routledge, pp. 131-145.
- McGowan, PJ 2003. 'African Military Coups d'État, 1956-2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 41(3), pp.339-370.
- Molomo, M.G. 2000. 'Democracy under Siege: The Presidency and Executive Powers in Botswana.' Pula; *Botswana Journal of African Studies* vol.14, (1), pp.95-108.
- Molomo, MG 2000. 'Understanding Government and Opposition Parties in Botswana', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol 38 (1), pp.65-92.
- Molomo, MG, Molefe, W and Seabo, B 2015. 'Amid Perceived Escalating Corruption, Botswana Demand Officials Account and Declare Assets', *Afrobarometer Dispatch* No. 19, www.afrobarometer.org
- Molomo, R 2012. *Democratic Deficit in the Parliament of Botswana*. Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Study of African Society.
- Molutsi, P 2005. 'Botswana's Democracy in a Southern African Regional Perspective: Progress or Decline?' in Maundeni, Z (Ed.), *40 Years of Democracy in Botswana*. Gaborone: Mmegi Publishing House, pp.10-28.
- Nasha, MN 2014. *Madam Speaker, Sir! Breaking the Glass Ceiling: One Woman's Struggles*. Gaborone: Diamond Educational Publishers.
- Ntuane, B 2018. 'President Festus Mogae: The Regent Who Became King', *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 50, pp.333-338.
- Ookeditse, L 2021. 'The "Burden of Expectation" and Political Instability: A Case for Direct Election of the President of Botswana', *African Security Review*, 30 (1), pp.121-136.
- Parsons, N, Henderson, W and Tlou, T 1995. *Seretse Khama, 1921-1980*. Gaborone: Botswana Society and Macmillan.
- Pertersen, G and Somuano, F 2021. Mexican De-democratisation? Pandemic, Hyper-presidentialism and Attempts to Rebuild a Dominant Party System', *Revista De Ciencia Política*, vol. 41 (2), pp.353-376, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353963804_Mexican_De-Democratization_Pandemic_Hyper-Presidentialism_and_Attempts_to_Rebuild_a_Dominant_Party_System, accessed 10 August 2024.
- Poteete, AR 2012. 'Electoral Competition, Factionalism, and Persistent Party Dominance in Botswana', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 50 (1), pp.75-102.
- Rotberg, R., 2013. *Africa Emerges: Consummate challenges, abundant opportunities*. John Wiley.
- Sebudubudu, D and Osei-Hwedie, BZ 2006. 'Pitfalls of Parliamentary Democracy in Botswana', *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 41 (1), pp.35-53, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-104689>, accessed 10 August 2024.
- Tsie, B, 2017. 'Botswana's Developmental Democracy in a Global Context', in Sebudubudu, D, Osei-Hwedie, BZ and Tsie, B (Eds.), 2017. *Botswana's Parliamentary Democracy Revisited*. Pretoria: Unisa University Press.
- Seabo, B and Nyenhuis, R 2021. 'Botswana's 2019 General Elections: A Referendum on the Khama Legacy and Party Dominance?' *Africa Spectrum* , vol. 56 (1), pp.53-76.
- Southall, R 2003, 'Botswana's Democratic Development', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 21 (2), pp.215-231.

Media Sources

- African Wildlife Foundation 23 May 2019. *AWF Statement on Botswana Decision to Lift Elephant Hunting Ban*, <https://www.awf.org/news/awf-statement-botswana-decision-lift-elephant-hunting-ban>, WHEN WAS THIS ACCESSED?
- Bale, R 22 May 2019. *Botswana Lifts Ban on Elephant Hunting*, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/botswana-lifts-ban-on-elephant-hunting>, WHEN WAS THIS ACCESSED?
- Booty, N 13 September 2024. *Surprise Return to Botswana by Ex-president to Face Trial*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles>, Accessed 3 October 2024.
- Dixon, R. 1 April 2018. *This Former African President Stands Out-and Not Just Because He Once Crashed an Air Force Plane*, <https://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-botswana-president-20180330-story.html>, Accessed 23 October 2024.
- Du Plessis, C 28 November 2021. *Former Botswana President Ian Khama Denies Fleeing the Country*, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-11-28-former-botswana-president-ian-khama-denies-fleeing-the-country>, accessed 3 October 2024.
- Freedom House 2017. *Freedom in the World 2017: Botswana*, www.freedomhouse.org, accessed 10 June 2018.
- Jacobson, C 31 March 2008. *Mogae Steps Down "a proud citizen"*, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/mogae-steps-down-a-proud-citizen>, accessed 23 October 2024.
- Kaelo, G 10 April 2018. *"I Feared DIS": Former Minister Kebonang*, www.mmegi.bw, accessed 10 June 2018.
- Kanono, R 23 August 2021. *Butterfly Walks Free!* <https://thepatriot.co.bw/butterfly-walks-free/>, accessed 19 October 2024.
- Mathala, S 1 August 2021. *Govt Loses Butterfly P100 Billion Money Laundering Case*, <https://thevoicebw.com/govt-loses-butterfly-p100-billion-money-laundering-case/>, 19 October 2024.
- Mathala, S 8 March 2024. *Judgment Day in Masisi Family Court Case*, <https://www.mmegi.bw/news/judgment-day-in-masisi-family-court-case/news>, accessed 19 October 2024.
- Mckenzie, D. 2 June 2019. *Botswana's return to elephant hunting wont solve any problems, ex-President says*. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/02/africa/botswana-president-hunting-ban-intl/index.html>
- Media Institute for Southern Africa 26 October 2014. *Sunday Standard Senior Reporter Edgar Tsimane Granted Asylum by South African Government*, www.misa.org, accessed 9 June 2018.
- Media Institute for Southern Africa 18 December 2014. *MISA Botswana Statement on Advertising Bans*, <https://misa.org/blog/misa-botswana-statement-on-advertising-bans/>, accessed 9 June 2018.
- Mlambo, N 18 January 2019. *Once most feared man in Botswana arrested on corruption charges*. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201901180683.html>, accessed 3 October 2024.
- Mokwape, M 7 June 2024. *Kgosi Increases His Wins Against DIS*, <https://www.mmegi.bw/news/kgosi-increases-his-wins-against-dis/news>, accessed 18 October 2024.
- Mokwena, N 8 June 2017. *Ombudsman Slams Btv's Biased News Coverage*, Mmegi Online, www.mmegi.bw, accessed 8 June 2018.
- Piet, B 21 November 2019. *The P100bn Heist*, <https://www.thegazette.news/news/the-p100bn-heist/>, accessed 19 October 2024.

Morton, B 6 November 2019. 'How Masisi Outsmarted Khama to Take the Reins in Botswana, *The Conversation*, November 6, <https://theconversation.com/how-masisi-outsmarted-khama-to-take-the-reins-in-botswana-126150>, accessed 23 October 2024.

Rantsimako, S 26 September 2024. 'Khama to Fully Participate in BPF Election Campaign', <https://www.thegazette.news/news/khama-to-fully-participate-in-bpf-election-campaign>, accessed 3 October 2024.

Reuters, 31 March 2018. 'Botswana's Khama Steps Down as President after a Decade at Helm', <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/botswanas-khama-steps-down-as-president-after-a-decade-at-helm-idUSL8NIRD085/>, accessed 23 October 2024.

Selelo, B 3 June 2022. 'Major Absentee- Former Botswana President Ian Khama Missing at His Sister's Funeral', <https://www.pula24.co.bw/news/825-former-botswana-president-ian-khama-missing-at-his-sisters-funeral>, accessed 3 October 2024.

Whande, M. 22 February 2023. 'I am a Long Term Tourist in South Africa-Khama', <https://www.sundaystandard.info/i-am-a-long-term-tourist-in-south-africa-khama>, accessed 3 October 2024.